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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001760

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: BOMBING OF MULTIPLE MINOR SHRINES IS A NON- EVENT
IN DIYALA

Classified By: Classified by Political Counselor Robert Ford; reason
1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: This is a PRT Baquba cable. The reported bombings of several shrines on May 13-14, which have provoked comparisons in the international press with the late February bombing of the al-Askariya shrine in Samarra, appear to have had virtually no effect on Sunni-Shi'a relations in Diyala. Coalition forces are still unable to verify the number of shrines that were bombed, and area Shi'a leaders seem confused as to the number of shrines that have been destroyed. The attacks on shrines to Sunni mullahs as well as Shi'a and neutral figures has apparently ensured that neither side blames the other, but simple "outrage fatigue" may be just as responsible for suppressing a reaction. One contact speculated that the Wahhabis were responsible for attacking the shrines to holy men of the two sects. END SUMMARY.

EXTENT OF SHRINE ATTACKS STILL IN QUESTION

12. (C) Over an approximately 24-hour period on May 13-14, six shrines to Muslim holy figures in Diyala were reported to the coalition forces as having been damaged by explosions. All of the shrines were located in a thinly-populated area of central Diyala bounded on the west by Ba'qubah, on the east by the town of Balad Ruz, and on the north by the city of Muqadiyah and the villages on the southern bank of the Diyala River. Since the initial rash of reports, our contacts have reported other attacks on shrines to us. However, coalition forces have only been able to identify one shrine that had appeared to have been recently attacked with explosives.

13. (C) The shrines initially identified by the ISF as having been destroyed included the tombs of Abdullah bin Imam Ali al-Hadi (Shi'a), the Imam Abu Tameem, (Shi'a) the Imam Abu Hadeed (Shi'a), the Imam Ali bin Jabbir (Shi'a), the Prophet Fityan (revered by both Sunnis and Shi'a), and the Prophet Daniel (Sunni/Shi'a). A CF patrol to the sites of the alleged explosions found only four shrine sites, including only one shrine of any size that seemed to have been damaged in a recent explosion; several of the shrines seemed to either have been damaged further in the past or to simply have been allowed to crumble through neglect.

14. (C) Conversations with contacts on the subject have been confused. Various contacts have claimed that four other shrines, including those for Habash bin Imam Kazim (Shia), al-Sayyed Umran (Shi'a), the Imam Mansour (Sunni, and Dada Wali (Sunni). The mayor of the northwestern, predominantly Shi'a city of Khalis (outside of the area where the other shrines were destroyed) claimed that an IED was discovered and defused next to the shrine of al-Sayyed Yusuf (Shi'a)

in his city. No two contacts have given the same list of destroyed shrines.

MUTED REACTION BY SHI'A, SUNNIS

15. (C) Discussion at the provincial council meeting two days after the alleged destruction of the shrines focused on allocation of reconstruction and development project monies allocated to the province by Baghdad (septel) and on an incident in Balad Ruz on the previous day in which a car with six area teachers in it had been stopped by gunmen who had released the two Sunni teachers while they killed the four Shia. The subject of the shrines was not even broached in the discussion. After the meeting, PRT poloff engaged several members of the council from the region in which the shrines had been destroyed. Not one of them could think of the names of more than two of the destroyed shrines.

16. (C) Sheikh Taleb al-'Utbi, the influential Hawza representative in eastern Diyala living in Balad Ruz and the imam of the town's only Shi'a mosque, seemed distressed when engaged by poloff. He noted, however, that the killing of the teachers (his cousins as well) were the primary reason for his funk. He at least was able to name several of the shrines that had allegedly been destroyed noted the presence of Sunni shrines among those destroyed and postulated that the destruction might have been carried out by local "Wahhabi" Sunni extremists who would view the building of shrines to people - Sunni or Shi'a - as a form of idolatry. Alternatively, he suggested, the shrines might have been destroyed by one of several irreligious

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outside groups who had recently been active in the region, including Ba'thists and, intriguingly, the Mujahedin e-Khalq. He said that he did not blame the local Sunnis at all, and that none of the other Shi'a imams with whom he had talked had reacted to the bombings with anger - only with sadness.

COMMENT

17. (C) The muted reaction to the destruction of the shrines seems to indicate that they held a relatively low position in the eyes of area Shi'a. The destruction of the Sunni shrines may also have helped to soften the sectarian blow, though most of our contacts appeared to be unaware that any non-Shi'a shrines had been targeted. Ultimately, however, the most salient reason for the non-reaction of Diyala's Shi'a to the destruction of the shrines may be simple desensitization - after six mass-casualty suicide attacks on Diyala's Shi'a mosques in seven months, the destruction of the al-Askariya shrine, and ongoing assassinations, the tombs of minor saints might reasonably be seen as a peripheral concern.

KHALILZAD